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CBC Newsletter

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For members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., Ornithological Society of the Carolinas

Volume 56 June 2010 Number 3

BACK TO THE CAROLINA SANDHILLS!

CBC Fall Meeting 24-26 SEPTEMBER!

Marion Clark

We're returning to the Sandhills just two-and-a-half years after our last meeting there. But this time it is the South Carolina Sandhills, and in the fall instead of spring. The Sandhills, the inland-most part of the Coastal Plain featuring deep, sandy, soils and rolling topography, border the "fall line" in South Carolina, a 10-30 mile-wide swath running southwest to northeast across the state from Aiken County through Columbia to Chesterfield County. The longleaf pine-turkey oak-wiregrass ecosystem dominates the Sandhills, harboring a unique mix of plants and animals adapted to these hot and dry conditions. For birders this indicates the likely presence of Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, Summer Tanager, Bachman's Sparrow among others.

Our fall meeting, 24-26 September, will be in a most favorable Sandhills city – Aiken, SC. While Aiken County is almost totally Sandhills, within an hour's drive one can be well onto the Coastal Plain or well onto the Piedmont. Like other cities in the Sandhills of the Carolinas, Aiken became popular as a winter resort for golfers and horse-lovers in the late 19th century. The spacious downtown area is full of Victorian architecture and lovely gardens; it is a walker's dream!

Perhaps the most significant birding is at 3,154-acre Silver Bluff Audubon Center & Sanctuary on the Savannah River. This site has a long history, going back to 16th century Spanish explorers and an 18th century trading post. Formerly a governor's plantation and then a hunting preserve, it is now partly-managed for Wood Storks, 400-500 of which are there during post-nesting dispersal. Manager Paul Koehler will be our field trip leader at Silver Bluff, and on Saturday evening we will go there for an outdoor, very informal roving interpretation of their mission. Drinks and snacks will be available, and maybe there will be time for some owling too!

Attractive bird areas also include Aiken State Natural Area for some of the best bay-swamp habitat in the state; Beaverdam Ditch and Brickyard Ponds; Gum Swamp Road; Hitchcock Woods, a typical Sandhills longleaf pine-wiregrass association; Phinizy Swamp; Stevens Creek Heritage Preserve, a rich, wooded area in the Piedmont, perhaps better known to botanists than birders; and others.

Hotel headquarters are the Country Inn & Suites at 3270 Whiskey Road; phone, 803-649-4024. To reserve a room, please call the hotel directly, refer to the Carolina Bird Club block and have a credit card ready with which to hold your reservation. Call by September 9th. All reservations made after that date can get the same rates, but they will be subject to availability. Standard rooms (two queen-size beds) are $84.36 per night (including taxes) or suites with two queen-size beds in the bedroom, a queen-size pull-out sofa in the

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PIPING PLOVERS COLOR-MARKED IN THE BAHAMAS

In an effort to determine where Piping Plovers wintering in The Commonwealth of the Bahamas are staging during migration, and breeding, 57 birds were uniquely color-marked this winter in the Bahamas for Environment Canada by Sidney Maddox and Peter Doherty, with help from The Bahamas National Trust. Each bird has a black flag (band with a tab sticking out slightly) on the upper left leg, nothing on the upper right, a single color band on one lower leg, and two color bands (which can be the same color on top of each other) on the other lower leg. Colors used included: red, orange, yellow, white, light green, dark green, dark blue, and black. Please report all sightings to the address below and note the color and location of each band on the bird, and location and behavior of the bird (on nest or brood, foraging at migratory stop-over, etc.), as well as presumed sex of the bird, if possible.

Cheri Gratto-Trevor
Prairie and Northern Wildlife Research Centre
Environment Canada
115 Perimeter Road, Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X4 Canada
e-mail: cheri.gratto-trevor@ec.gc.ca

By mid-April four sightings of Bahamas-banded Piping Plovers had been received from up and down the East Coast including birds in Florida and Connecticut. Keep your eyes open this summer and during fall migration!

Did You Know?

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas consists of 29 islands, 661 cays, and 2,387 islets totaling just over 5,300 square miles of land. The highest point is on Cat Island at 207 feet, although the highest point on most of the larger islands is no more than 65 feet above sea level.

The southern islands are home to a huge American Flamingo flock, and many of the small islets provide nesting areas for Audubon's Shearwater and White-tailed Tropicbird. The Bahamas are home to three endemic species, the Bahama Woodstar, the Bahama Swallow, and the Bahama Yellowthroat. The islands are also the primary wintering ground for the rare Kirtland's Warbler that nests in the Jack Pine forests of Michigan and surrounding areas.

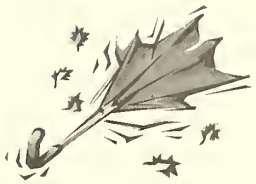
With a list of at least 324 species, The Bahamas offer an "exotic" birding adventure that starts just a few dozen miles off the coast of southeastern Florida.

Piping Plover showing color bands on both legs
Photo by Anne Maddox

Piping Plover showing color bands and black flag marker on left upper leg
Photo by Anne Maddox

CBC'ers Brave the Elements During the Atlantic Beach Winter Meeting!

John Fussell



It was said that this meeting had the worst weather of any CBC meeting, and I would not disagree. Friday was a very raw day, with a brisk, biting northeaster. Saturday was similar, but also had steady rain much of the day! Most of Saturday's trips had to be cancelled. Of course, both Friday's and Saturday's trips to Cape Lookout had to be cancelled. (I sure would have liked to have been out at Cape Lookout point on Saturday morning, IF I could have been in a four-wheel-drive!) At least we did not have any of the icy conditions that affected areas just a short distance to the northwest and west of us.

Especially given the atrocious weather, I was impressed with the very positive attitudes of both leaders and participants. I really did not hear many negative comments during the meeting. Again, thanks to all the leaders, and a hand of applause to all participants.

As most birders know, the same weather that can make for very uncomfortable birding can also often provide some spectacular birding, and the CBC weekend was no exception. When the first birders checked out the ocean Saturday morning, it was obvious that there was a rather heavy flight of ocean birds heading up the coast, flying by just off the end of the Sheraton Pier. The most common species--at least when I was watching--were Northern Gannet, Forster's Tern, and Razorbill. The Razorbill flight was spectacular for our area. About 750 were counted during the day! To put this in perspective, in all my many, many days of birding along Bogue Banks, I probably have not seen over 100 Razorbills total. Also observed by three individuals were two Red-necked Grebes, another great find. Although there were not large numbers of scoters associated with this up-the-coast flight, all three species were seen close enough to be easily identifiable with binoculars. (About ten White-winged were seen during the day.)

Also taking advantage of weather possibilities during the day was Phil Warren's Down East group. They saw both Virginia Rail and Sora on the Cedar Island causeway, not really surprising given that most of the marshes were under water at the time.

Other highlights of the weekend were:

Eurasian Wigeon: The drake at Lilliput Pond near New Bern was still present on Friday. (The drake at Old Airport Road in Morehead seemed to have departed the week before the meeting.)

Common Eider: Ricky Davis saw a female on the ocean off Indian Beach on Sunday. (Another female was seen by a non-participant on the Beaufort waterfront on Friday--this is probably the same bird that was at the Fort Macon jetties for much of January.)

Long-tailed Duck: Ricky Davis saw one on the ocean off Indian Beach on Sunday.

Great Cormorant: Two on the rocks at the Cedar Island ferry terminal on Friday and Saturday. (Although the habitat looks great for Greats at this site, they are actually rather rare there--their presence on Friday and Saturday was probably related to the atrocious weather.)

American Bittern: One was seen well by many at North River Farms. (On the second trip, one was glimpsed, but it "melted away" before our eyes.)

Bald Eagle: Several were seen, at various sites.

"Krider's" Red-tailed Hawk: This very pale bird was seen at North River Farms on Friday. (This site, which borders the vast Open Grounds Farm--which looks like an area in the prairie states--has harbored other pale Red-taileds in recent years.)

Peregrine Falcon: Individuals were seen at North River Farms and at the Rachel Carson Reserve.

Sandhill Crane: The 3 birds that have been overwintering in Beaufort were seen by several observers on Sunday morning.

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U.K. Study of Potential Dangers to Birds from Wind Farms

Paul Serridge

A not uncommon reason for opposition to wind farms is the danger that these constructions may pose to birds, particularly during migration. An article on the British Broadcasting Corporation news website on April 9 explained work that is being done in Britain to obtain some factual data.

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), a leading United Kingdom conservation organization founded in 1946 by the naturalist and artist, the late Sir Peter Scott, is conducting a study of Barnacle Geese that migrate from Britain to Svalbard in the far north of Norway and pass through an area in which offshore wind farms are planned.

Over the past four years, the migration of 25 tagged Barnacle Geese has been studied, and five more have been tagged prior to this year's spring migration.

The researchers hope that this year's experiment, which uses solar-powered GPS tags, will help fill in missing information about flight altitude and whether the birds rest on the open sea during migration. They also hope to learn how the migrating geese cope with existing wind farms on the Norwegian coast.

There is a risk of collision, but also the possibility that the birds use the wind farms as navigational markers.

The WWT hopes that data gathered will help influence the placement of future wind farms and whether lights should be added to render them more visible to the migrating geese.

This study is typical of the way the WWT works with national and local authorities to preserve Britain's wildlife. It is reassuring to see a report of a planned experiment to determine facts in the hope of influencing future decisions. Facts will trump assumptions every time!

Northern Pintail as an Asian Vagrant?

A Northern Pintail is not at the top of most lists of potential Asian vagrants. That list may include species like Red-throated Pipit, Slaty-backed Gull, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper… even a Siberian Accentor. But a pintail? They are one of the more common North American breeding ducks, but, one might think, surely not a candidate for an Asian stray.

While common in the United States and Canada, the Northern Pintail also ranges across Asia and Europe. Many winter in the Japanese Islands, and some 110,000 have been banded there by The Bird Migration Research Center at the Yamashinsa Institute of Ornithology. Some of these birds have been found to winter, at least occasionally, in North America. Ducks Unlimited reports that to date, forty-three Northern Pintail bands have been recovered in the United States, primarily along the West Coast.

Though not as likely on the East Coast, the next time you are enjoying a wintering flock of pintails at a wetland or lake in the Carolinas, it is exciting to consider the possibility that one of the birds could hail from the Far East!

...And Speaking of International Travelers...

By the time this Newsletter reaches your mailbox, flocks of Red Knots will be migrating along the coast on the way to their high-latitude breeding grounds.

Red Knot populations show some of the most serious declines of any North American shorebird, and much research is underway to learn more about this species and what efforts might make the most difference in stabilizing or increasing their numbers.

Red Knots have been banded in several areas that can be identified by the color of the flag attached to the legs of the birds. Birds with RED flags were banded in Chile; ORANGE flags in Argentina; BLUE flags in Brazil; LIME GREEN in Florida; DARK GREEN in the Delaware Bay area; and WHITE in Canada.

Welcome New Members!

The Carolina Bird Club extends a very warm welcome to our newest members!

Lucy Berry
Ruffin, NC

Alex and Mindy Capaldi
Raleigh, NC

Karyl Gabriel
Huntersville, NC

Brent and Carol Gearhart
Pfafftown, NC

Richard Reilly
Lambertville, NJ

Eugene Young
Shelby, NC

Barbara Abbott
Cary, NC

Louise Belk
Cary, NC

Robin Hudson
Raleigh, NC

Judi Durr
Kernersville, NC

Bob & Michelle Chase
Estes Park, CO

Edward & Rose DeBuysscher
Holly Springs, NC

Susan & Steve Edwards
Pittsboro, NC

Rebecca Houseman
Knoxville, TN

Doug McAbee
Wellford, SC

Tedi McManus
Wilson, NC

Dick & Dottie Metzler
Charlotte, NC

Denise Meyerson
Atlantic Beach, NC

Robert Moffett
Wilmington, NC

Bob Powell
Wilmington, OH

Jon Rouse
Fayetteville, NC

Kim Spaulding
Foxfire Village, NC

Howard Vainright
Greenville, NC

Michelle Vieyra
Columbia, SC

Lynne Mattocks Lucas

Read The Chat and the Newsletter anywhere you have Internet access!

The most recent editions of the Newsletter and The Chat are online on the CBC website. Older editions of The Chat are free for anyone to download, but the CBC Newsletter and the two most recent calendar years of The Chat are available only to CBC members. All CBC members will use the same username and password to access these publications. The username is "**member**" and the password is "**birdfun**".

This is a membership benefit, please don't share the password with non-members! The password will be changed from time to time, but can always be found in the most recent print edition of the Newsletter.

Go to http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/newsletter to access the Newsletter, and http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/chat to access The Chat.

H. Douglas Pratt

BACK TO THE CAROLINA SANDHILLS!
CBC Fall Meeting 24-26 SEPTEMBER!

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living room and two TV sets, may be had at $95.46 per night (including taxes). There is a mini-fridge and microwave oven in each room, and a complimentary hot breakfast is available beginning at 6:00 a.m.

Plan to enjoy a group buffet meal Friday night as we go to Newberry Hall at 117 Newberry Street SW in downtown Aiken. The featured speaker at our Friday night dinner is Patti Newell, a University of Georgia graduate student and recent CBC grant recipient, who will present her research on Rusty Blackbirds, much of which was done at Lake Conestee Nature Park, Greenville, SC.

Don't delay in making plans for going back to the Carolina Sandhills, 24-26 September! Aiken is "the original winter colony, where visitors are always in season." And they have plenty...year round.!

Atlantic Beach Winter Meeting

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Red Knot: Several were seen along the beaches of Bogue Banks and at the Rachel Carson Reserve.

Purple Sandpiper: 2 or 3 were at the Fort Macon jetties.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman's Sparrow: It's my understanding that on Friday's Croatan National Forest field trips all participants got good looks at Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and that most got good looks at Bachman's Sparrows. I was very impressed that Bachman's were seen well under those conditions!
(Bachman's Sparrows are overwintering in the Croatan in what may be, at least in modern times, unprecedented numbers.)

Orange-crowned Warbler: 2 or 3 were seen by several observers.

Black-and-white Warbler: One was at Fort Macon State Park on Sunday morning.

Yellow-breasted Chat, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, and Baltimore Orioles: These were all seen in John Fussell's yard.

Brewer's Blackbird: Ricky Davis's trip on Friday found six Brewer's at Open Grounds Farm (two males, four females). Ricky deserves some kudos for talking his way into the farm.

In addition to the "real birds", several participants made a late-day pilgrimage to downtown Morehead to see a Black-hooded Parakeet.

In addition to birds, participants on Rich and Susan Boyd's Croatan trip got to see Venus flytraps, and participants on Jeannie Kraus and Carol Reigle's maritime forest trip got to see golden hair lichen (a rare coastal fringe species).

Let's hope that next winter's meeting has great birds, but maybe a little better weather!

Which Species "Won" the Great Backyard Bird Count?

While not a contest as such, each year one species of bird reigns supreme as the most tallied bird during the Great Backyard Bird Count. This annual count of "feeder birds" and "yard birds" is sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the National Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada. In its 13th year, more than 63,000 participants submitted counts of birds.

So what was the bird seen in greater numbers than any other? Mourning Dove? Northern Cardinal? Would you believe American Robin?? The robin is generally not considered one of the front-runners for most observed bird as it rarely attends feeders and for most of the United States, disappears from suburban yards entirely as birds join wintering flocks that often stick to woodlots and rural areas. It is this flocking behavior that slips the robin from an also-ran to the top of the heap. One Florida flock was estimated at nearly a million birds! When added to those reported by other observers, the robin takes the crown with more than 1.8 million individual birds reported.

The project serves to identify broad trends in bird populations and distribution, as well as encourage interest in conserving habitat for birds, and raising awareness of other environmental issues facing our avian friends.

Look for the 15th edition of the Count in February 2011.

Ventures Offers Special CBC trip to Churchill and Southern Manitoba

July 2-13, 2010

Leader: Simon Thompson

Churchill, a small town on the Hudson Bay in Manitoba, Canada, started out as a fur-trapping and trading company in the early 1700's, and grew into a small port when the railway came through in 1929. Nowadays Churchill has become famous among birders for its combination of spectacular migration of birds towards the Arctic and because of easy accessibility to the northern breeding species.

A visit to the bleak tundra of Churchill will be a highlight of our visit to Canada, but there's much more to offer the visitor. Here too are wide-open prairies, a vast wilderness of mountains and lakes and bird-rich wetlands. Our visit will coincide with the peak of migration, and we should see many birds passing through on their way further north. These should include Hudsonian Godwit and Red-necked Phalarope and the beautiful Little Gull. Ross' Gull has become difficult to see over the past few years, but we still have a very good chance to see one. The birding here is unforgettable, and this variety of habitats from Arctic waters to boreal forests and seemingly endless prairies will give us a chance to see an excellent of northern and boreal species in this spell of Arctic springtime.

Please contact the Ventures office to register. Your place on this Venture will be reserved as soon as a deposit of $200 payable to Ventures, Inc. has been received. You can pay by check or call the office with your VISA or MasterCard #. This Venture is limited to 10 participants.

Cost of Manitoba Venture

$3,295 per person from Winnipeg,
based on double occupancy.
(Single supplement **$475**)

Price includes: All accommodations, internal air, van, boat and train transportation, all meals, service charges, entrance fees & gratuities (except for leader/guide), information packet & bird check-list, leader/guide service.

Not included: Air travel to Winnipeg, alcoholic beverages, laundry, and any other items of a personal nature.

What birds can we hope to see?

Great Gray & Short-eared Owls, Ross's, Sabine's, Little & Thayer's Gulls, Parasitic, Long-tailed & Pomarine Jaegers, Hudsonian Godwit, Stilt Sandpiper, Spruce Grouse, Willow Ptarmigan, Red & Red-necked Phalaropes, Connecticut & Mourning Warblers, Mountain Bluebird, Boreal Chickadee, Pine Grosbeak, LeConte's & Harris's Sparrows, Snow Bunting.

(A full birdlist will be sent out upon registration)

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Upcoming CBC Meetings

Aiken, SC September 24-26, 2010
Nags Head, NC January 28-30 2011

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